DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS

COMPLETE STATEMENT

OF

GERALD W. BARNES
DIRECTOR, PROGRAMS DIRECTORATE
GREAT LAKES & OHIO RIVER DIVISION
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BEFORE

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

ON

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Committee members, and distinguished guests, I am pleased to testify before you on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) activities within the Great Lakes Basin.

The Great Lakes system is one of our nation's most vital natural resources. The world's largest freshwater system provides millions of U.S. and Canadian residents water for consumption, transportation, power, recreation, and a number of other uses. The Corps looks forward to continuing to work with our sister Federal agencies to collaborate with States and local communities to address regional issues relating to the use, restoration and protection of this nationally significant water resource.

My comments will focus on the issues facing the physical, chemical and biological resources of the Great Lakes, Corps programs to assist State and local efforts to address many of these issues, and the Corps' coordination of these programs with international, Federal, State, and local agencies and organizations.

Great Lakes Issues

The challenges facing the Great Lakes are numerous and complex. Environmental challenges include contaminated sediments, invasive species, non-point source pollution, habitat alteration and loss, and fish and wildlife conservation. There are also many economic challenges facing the States and local communities of the Great Lakes, including aging commercial and recreational navigation infrastructure and the increasing demands for water use and consumption.

The restoration of the Great Lakes in a sustainable manner requires that all these issues be considered from a watershed perspective, emphasizing collaboration and integration, and based upon sound science. Success requires the participation of all interested parties in the planning and decision-making process. This participation would foster an open dialogue to integrate sometimes competing or conflicting water resource needs. Such integration and collaboration are indispensable to meeting water challenges.

Although primacy for water resources management in the U.S. has been and must continue to be at the State and local level, the Great Lakes are an international resource. It is therefore appropriate for the Federal government to support local and regional efforts to protect and restore Great Lakes water resources. Congress has looked to the States, and in particular the Governors, to establish the priorities for restoration. The Great Lakes Governors have done this with their set of nine priorities for management of this shared water resource. With the direction provided by these priorities, a comprehensive plan should be formulated to facilitate an effective coordination between Federal and non-Federal programs to restore the Great Lakes.

Overview of Corps Great Lakes Programs

The Corps is supporting international, State and local efforts to protect and restore the Great Lakes ecosystem through our Civil Works programs. This support includes activities directed at the three basic elements of the Great Lakes resources: physical, chemical and biological.

Physical

Undoubtedly, the most valuable physical resource of the Great Lakes is the water itself. The Corps is a member of the team that monitors, predicts and regulates water withdrawals, flows and diversions through our support to the International Joint Commission (IJC) Boards of Control. We are also supporting the IJC reference study that is re-evaluating the operating plan for Lake Ontario. This interdisciplinary, interagency study is an example of the type of effort required to balance sometimes conflicting needs for water resources, including hydropower, navigation, riparian interests, recreational users, and the ecosystem.

The Corps has developed an inventory of biohydrologic information relevant to Great Lakes water management in partnership with the Great Lakes Commission. This study will include a gap analysis of water-related data and is closely integrated with the Annex 2001 activities of the Great Lakes Governors that are developing a process for the States to manage and make decisions on new water uses and diversions.

In addition to water management, the Corps is supporting States and local partners on other aspects of Great Lakes physical resources, including land management, erosion protection and soil conservation. Through the Great Lakes Tributary Model program (Sec 516e, WRDA 96), the Corps is developing watershed models for Great Lakes tributaries to provide a tool for State and local land managers to evaluate the impacts of land use practices and optimize their soil conservation and erosion prevention efforts.

Chemical

Contaminated bottom sediments are a most difficult part of the chemical issues facing the Great Lakes resources. Through partnerships with States, port authorities and local governments, the Corps has removed over 90 million cubic yards of contaminated sediments from Great Lakes ports and navigation channels and managed these materials in confined disposal facilities, or CDFs. Over 70 million cubic yards of these contaminated sediments were removed from Great Lakes Areas of Concern. The contribution of this massive removal of contaminated sediments to Great Lakes restoration goals is often overlooked.

In addition to removal of contaminated sediments for navigation, the Corps is working with States and local groups to perform sediment cleanups through our Environmental Dredging program (Sec 312, WRDA 90). The Ashtabula River Partnership is a collaboration of Federal, State, local and industrial partners that have joined forces to clean-up contaminated sediments from the Ashtabula River Area of Concern using this program. We are also currently working on feasibility studies for environmental dredging in collaboration with the States of Wisconsin and Indiana on Fox and Grand Calumet Rivers.

Through our Great Lakes Remedial Action Plans, or RAP program (Sec 401, WRDA 90), the Corps' expertise in management of contaminated sediments is being used to support the planning and design of sediment cleanup projects by States and local RAP groups. Sediment cleanup plans developed through this program are being proposed for construction under the EPA's Great Lakes Legacy Act.

The Corps has provided technical support to our sister Federal agencies in their programs dealing with contaminated sediments. We have worked closely with EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office to evaluate and demonstrate new and improved technologies for managing contaminated sediments. We have supported EPA Regional offices on Superfund projects that involve contaminated sediments. We have supported the Fish & Wildlife Service on a sediment cleanup project in the Saginaw River, and we are currently beginning support to EPA's Great Lakes Program Office for their Great Lakes Legacy Act program.

Biological

The Corps has collaborated with international, State and local agencies and organizations to address biological threats to the resources of the Great Lakes. The most visible of these efforts is the invasive species dispersal barriers on Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. For this project, the Corps assembled an advisory panel with experts from Federal, State, local governments and academia to screen technologies and provide recommendations on design and operation of the barrier.

The Corps is also supporting the efforts of States, tribes and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to battle the sea lamprey through construction of barriers at various Great Lakes tributaries to prevent the migration of these invaders to spawning areas.

The Corps is partnering with States and tribes on the Great Lakes Fishery & Ecosystem Restoration program (Sec 506, WRDA 00). Under this program, a series of individual projects will be planned, designed and built to restore and enhance aquatic habitat , which will aid in the restoration of the Great Lakes Basin. An operating plan for this program was developed in collaboration with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and utilizes the strategic plan for Great Lakes fisheries developed by States, provinces and tribes as the guiding path for the program.

Interagency Coordination

The size and importance of the Great Lakes water resource and the complexity of the challenges before it necessitate a team approach to its management. The Corps has worked as a team member, as well as team leader, in different aspects of the collective environmental programs for the Great Lakes Basin.

The Corps and EPA jointly conducted one the first ecosystem restoration plans ever performed, over 30 years ago on Lake Erie. We are a member of the U.S. Policy Committee, led by the EPA, and participated in the development of their 2002 Strategic Plan to coordinate implementation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement by Federal and state agencies.

The Corps has led or participated in several reference studies of the IJC dealing with lake levels and water management. The Corps is currently engaged in a U.S.-Canadian collaborative study of the existing navigation infrastructure in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway in partnership with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Fish and Wildlife Service, Transport Canada, Environment Canada and the U.S. and Canadian Management organizations for the St. Lawrence Seaway. This study will establish the baseline conditions of the existing infrastructure, commercial navigation use, and the environmental conditions of the Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

On Tuesday, Mary 18, 2004, President Bush issued an Executive Order establishing a Great Lakes Interagency Task Force to promote regional collaboration of national significance for the Great Lakes. We look forward to working closely with the other Federal agencies on this Task Force to establish a regional collaboration to assure the sustainable use and protection of this vital resource.

Conclusion

The Corps is pleased to have had the opportunity to appear before you and provide an overview of our projects and studies of importance to the Great Lakes. We value highly the water resources of the Great Lakes, the partnerships we have formed with our sister Federal agencies, the Canadians, the Great Lakes States, Tribes, local governments and stakeholder groups in managing and protecting this unique resource.

The Corps looks forward to continuing these partnerships. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions.